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DEPARTMENT PASS EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE,S WINTER OF DISCONTENT

Classified By: Classified by CDA Eric Schultz, reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

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Overview  
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1. (C) The winter of Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) seems to have changed everything in Zimbabwe and nothing. Robert Mugabe is still president and likely to remain so for as long as he wants ) which could be until the day he dies. ZANU-PF is still firmly in control. The economy is still deteriorating. The people are still passive and essentially leaderless in the face of government repression as the MDC focuses inward. But the GOZ, under new day-to-day management, has dropped all pretense and revealed itself as a brutal ) and callous ) dictatorship. Since taking the reins of the government Mugabe,s would-be heirs, the Mujurus, have shown themselves to be not only mean-spirited and corrupt but, from a ZANU perspective, much worse - incompetent. With the steepening decline of the economy has come the steady erosion of the regime,s extensive patronage system that once bought off losers and kept party members loyal. In its absence repression, a la Murambatsvina, looms large as the regime,s alternative means of control.

2. (C) The turn to repression has cost the regime support internationally, regionally, and domestically. The Europeans have stiffened their resolve and even the region may finally have had enough if recent signals from South Africa are to be believed. ZANU itself is riven with dissension, exacerbated by the succession struggle and the decline of patronage, waiting only for Mugabe,s passing or incapacitation to burst forth. For its part, the MDC bides its time, convinced that the regime will implode and that it will pick up the pieces. The country,s future remains unpredictable but one thing seems clear after this winter, the restoration of democracy and prosperity in Zimbabwe will be more difficult, especially as what remains of the educated populace, black, white, or Indian, appears increasingly ready to throw in the towel and emigrate. The remainder of the population, psychologically scarred but unable to leave, is hunkering down and trying to survive what could be a very bad next few years.

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Murambatsvina,s Winter Chill  
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3. (C) Zimbabwe,s normally mild winter has been cloudy and cold this year. The nights have been especially bitter. The weather mirrors the national mood as Zimbabweans come to terms with the country,s bleak reality following Operation &Murambatsvina8 or Restore Order as it has been translated into English. In its first two months, the operation has left hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans, by some estimates more than a million, homeless and destitute. Many of these people, who were the poorest of the poor, are now sleeping in the open, enduring temperatures near freezing. The operation has also destroyed most of the country,s informal economy, which may have amounted to as much as 40 percent of GDP, and was critical to the strategies of many Zimbabweans, rich and poor alike, for coping with economic decline.

4. (C) Beyond the economic and social damage it has caused, it is also apparent that the operation has taken a psychological toll, in part because of its indiscriminate nature. For instance, it not only targeted MDC strongholds but ZANU-PF neighborhoods as well and in addition to African traders, the traditionally pro-ZANU-PF Indian community was hit hard. Most Zimbabweans seem angry about what has happened but feel powerless to do anything about it. Long-time observers of the country cannot recall a time when people were less hopeful about the country,s future. Inevitably, that means that many, especially the educated, are looking to leave. In the past few weeks, we have had an upsurge of long-term American residents of Zimbabwe seeking to renew American passports. In the words of one seventy-year old it is time to &give up.8 Many Embassy officers have reported similar discussions with friends and contacts in the country,s educated black middle class as well as among its small white and Indian ethnic minorities.

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Economic Meltdown  
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15. (C) It is not only Murambatsvina that is driving Zimbabweans to despair. The country is facing economic turmoil on a scale not seen even in 2002, the last major crisis. The country is desperately short of food, fuel, and the foreign exchange needed to buy them. With no access to balance of payments support, the country is caught in a vicious circle of declining exports leading to less foreign exchange leading to further declines in exports. Exporters have access to less and less of the foreign currency they generate which they need to pay for the imports needed to finish their products. Instead, the foreign currency coming into the country must pay for massive food and fuel imports ) with a certain amount also being siphoned off to feed official corruption.

16. (C) Food insecurity is arguably the most serious shortage facing the country, especially in rural areas. The shortfall has never been worse. The government's fast track land reform and this year's drought combined to produce a record low maize harvest. The country needs to import 1.2 million metric tons of maize, fully 75 percent of its needs. The IMF team that visited last month concluded that Zimbabwe probably had enough foreign currency to pay for food imports but that this would inevitably cause shortages elsewhere. Over the past two months, the GOZ has increased the pace of food imports, to nearly 100,000 MTs a month, but in the process has proven the IMF's point as a massive fuel shortage has erupted.

17. (C) For the urban population, it is the fuel situation that has come to symbolize the country's accelerating decline. The country is all but bereft of fuel. The price on the black market is up to Z\$70,000 a litre, which works out to roughly U.S. \$10 a gallon, and even at that price is almost impossible to find. Economic activity is grinding to a halt as a result of the fuel shortages. The only people who can routinely get fuel are those who work for companies or organizations, like the Embassy, that import their own. Or who work for the government. But even that source is apparently drying up. The police and intelligence officers are said to have had their allotments cut in half, and even mid-ranking ZANU-PF officials and their families are feeling the pinch.

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A Stronger Police State  
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18. (C) To the average Zimbabwean, white or black, rich or poor, the government's obsession with Murambatsvina while the economy is melting down seemed inexplicable. The consensus view among most of our regular contacts following the March parliamentary elections, especially in the business sector, was that a more secure ZANU-PF, its two-thirds majority restored, would adopt more moderate and sensible economic and social policies and would seek to regain the good graces of the international community. Instead, the opposite has happened. The new Cabinet, largely dominated by the Mujuru clan, victors in the internal ZANU-PF power struggle at last year's party congress, has turned to repression as its primary means of retaining power.

19. (C) There has been much speculation about the regime's true motives and about the role of President Mugabe in authorizing the operation. But of one thing we can be sure, the party leadership's intent was to increase their hold over the country, politically, economically, and socially. The overriding objective for the Mujuru's is to ensure that the Vice President, Joyce Mujuru, succeeds Mugabe, by whatever means necessary. As to Mugabe, the most telling comment was one the UN Special Envoy, Anna Tibaijuka, offered at dinner with the visiting staff on the night of July 25. She recounted how in her youth then President Nyerere had launched a similar operation in Tanzania only to stop it three days later when he saw it getting out of control. As Tibaijuka somberly noted, Mugabe made no effort to stop the operation, even after it was clear that it was causing massive human suffering. Whether he couldn't or whether he didn't care she left to her listeners to decide.

10. (C) The ruling clique probably believes the operation to have been a success. The raw demonstration of the regime's authority has gone largely unchallenged within Zimbabwe either by the opposition or by the people themselves. Much is made of the cultural passivity of the Shona people and perhaps that is part of the reason why the operation has largely gone unchallenged. But a more telling factor is simply fear. The regime retains a monopoly on the use of force and Zimbabweans of all stripes know it will not hesitate to deploy the police, or even the military if need be.

11. (C) On the surface the regime appears to be more in control of the country than ever before. However, that control has never been as naked before either and the regime's power base has essentially narrowed to the police, the security services, and the military. Even the party has become less reliable as economic decline has reduced the reach of the once extensive patronage system that kept party members loyal. The GOZ now rules almost entirely by intimidation and repression; for all intents and purposes it has become a police state.

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But a Weaker Regime  
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12. (C) Murambatsvina and the economic meltdown may have accelerated Zimbabwe's transition to a police state, but we would argue that it has not made the regime's long-term hold on the country, and especially that of the Mujuru's, more secure. In that regard, Murambatsvina may well prove to have been a critical mistake, one that has given the opponents of the current leadership of the regime, both within and without ZANU-PF, useful ammunition.

13. (C) The UN Special Envoy and her team came to the conclusion that neither enforced ruralization or the destruction of the informal economy would last long. We agree. Growing food insecurity in rural areas and the better prospects for making a living in the city will likely ensure that many people return and rebuild in urban and peri-urban areas. Many have never left at all. There is every likelihood that by the time the next national elections are held, whether in 2008 as scheduled or 2010 as rumored, current demographic patterns will have been reestablished and the MDC or some other opposition party will once more win the urban vote.

14. (C) More importantly, we would argue that Murambatsvina has had a number of unintended effects that have clearly weakened the regime for the long run and that will fuel attacks by its opponents within ZANU-PF and in the opposition. It has significantly increased Zimbabwe's international isolation. Following the elections it was clear that France, Italy and other European countries were preparing to press for the EU to normalize relations with the GOZ. That effort is now suspended indefinitely, much to the relief of our British colleagues. This development also has obvious implications for the IMF vote on expulsion in August, the danger of which the regime seems to have finally woken to.

15. (C) The operation has also begun to tear at African solidarity with Zimbabwe. It is much harder for the GOZ to spin to Africans a crackdown on poor blacks than it was the seizure of white farms. The Special Envoy's visit and her apparently negative report (due to be released July 22), along with last week's condemnation of the GOZ by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) have apparently put intense pressure on South African President Mbeki and other African leaders to finally take action on Zimbabwe.

16. (C) Finally, Murambatsvina has also further alienated ZANU-PF, ostensibly a people's liberation party, from the people it is supposed to have liberated. The current ruling clique, the Mujurus and their allies, may not care all that much, indeed every sign is that they have evolved into a kleptocracy primarily motivated by a desire to stay in power. However, it does seem to matter to many others within the party and has added to increasing internal dissension, already fueled by the succession struggle's move to a new phase at last year's party congress.

17. (C) Emmerson Mnangagwa and his supporters have yet to concede defeat and will no doubt use Murambatsvina and the continuing economic failures to discredit the current leadership, either from within the party or as the core of a third force in Zimbabwean politics. The MDC, assuming it survives its own internal dissension and its failure to show leadership or even solidarity with the victims of Murambatsvina, will also be able to use these failures to good effect in discrediting ZANU-PF as a whole in future elections.

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Conclusion: Make Them Pay  
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18. (C) The current leadership of ZANU-PF, Mugabe, the Mujurus, and Didymus Mutasa to name the key players, appear to have decided that they cannot reverse economic decline without adopting policies that would threaten their hold on power. Continued economic decline will make an unpopular regime still more unpopular. It will also affect the regime's ability to control its own party through the use of patronage. In this context, Murambatsvina makes perfect sense as a warning to the whole of Zimbabwe that the regime will do whatever it needs to in order to stay in power. Increased repression, however, will only deepen the

country,s misery and further undermine the regime,s  
legitimacy, domestically, regionally, and internationally.

19. (C) The regime made a bold move with Murambatsvina but it is one that already appears to be backfiring on them, as evidenced by the apparent pressure the South Africa Government is bringing to bear. We need ensure that the GOZ remains faced with its current unpalatable choice ) between policy changes that will undermine its hold on power or further repression that will undermine the regional support it needs to survive.

SCHULTZ